THE AMBITION OF MARK TRUITT

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A little timidly he made the offer. "I'm going to leave the brown mare with you, if you'd like her."

"It's good of you to think of it. But you can sell her well. And you'll need the money."

"I know. But I want you to have her. I traded to get her for you."

Courtney would not spoil his pleasure. "Of course, I—" His acceptance halted. "No, give her to Dr. Hedges."

Mark shook his head. "I want you to have her."

"He needs a good horse. The one he has—"

"It was a fair trade," Mark asserted defensively.

A turn of the road brought them within sight of a great hill that stood across the valley. Over its level top swept breezes filtered pure through many leagues of forest. "Hedges hill" the village called it, finding humorous matter therein.

Courtney pointed. "That is where the doctor wants to build his sanatorium for consumptives."

"I know. He's cracked over that. He'll never do it."

"Perhaps not. It would be too bad. It," Courtney added quietly, "is his big idea."

Mark looked long at the hill, as though from the site of the sanatorium in Spain might be gleaned some hint of the meaning of the "big idea."

After a while he said slowly, "Would you really rather he'd have the mare?"

CHAPTER II.

The Path of Youth.

Had Richard Courtney thought to look back to his own adolescence, he might have understood his failure.

Mark, whose life, the preacher supposed, was to be made over by many books and sermons on purpose, unselfishness and clean living, was in fact seeing a miracle of quite another sort unfold within him.

Companionship, once sought, had suddenly become distasteful. He was happy only when wandering alone in the woods, idle gun on shoulder, or drifting lazily in his canoe.

After a period, during which his body shot up to its full height, wholesome toil and study busied his thoughts and Richard Courtney began to nurture vain hopes, occurred an event of no small importance to many young gentlemen of Bethel. Unity Martin, proud possessor of a diploma declaring to those who cared to peruse that she had mastered certain arts, came home to exhibit in all its perfection the product of education.

He was returning late from an afternoon's hunt in the woods behind the Martin farm, when he unexpectedly came upon her one autumn day. She was standing on a little knob, gazing absently into the fading sky. His ever-ready imagination was touched. In the dusk, the pale glow of the dying day upon her, her pensiveness and apparent frailty gave her a seeming of soulfulness that abashed him, moved him strangely. He thought he beheld one far finer and purer than any of the clayey creatures his life had touched. She saw him and smiled faintly. That smile put him in an agony of confusion and awkwardness. Because he did not know how to depart, he found himself walking home with her, and when she praised the pheasants slung over his shoulder, on a sudden glad impulse he gave to her and she quite naturally accepted the trophy of his hunt. This was a prophecy, but he was no seer.

It was long before he lost that impression of her, the frail spirit-like girl of the dusk, even though riper acquaintance might have taught him that she was indeed a dweller upon the earth. He whispered her name to himself, thinking it finest poetry. His desire to "do something" became a burning impatience to do large and splendid deeds that would prove his mettle. He was, in a word, a boy who thought himself in love.

Came a night, a still winter's night when moonlight gleamed on the snow and the chimes of sleighbells added to the enchantment, when he kissed her, with a sense of sacrilege—and she did not resist.

No wonder, then, Richard Courtney preached purpose in vain! His pupil's horizon was filled with a purpose not his own. Even the preacher's incomprehensible outburst was forgotten, as the boy went to his tryst that Sabbath afternoon.

For a mile he drove carefully and then, letting out the mare, with a flourish of speed drew up before the house of Squire Martin. It was the most pretentious in the valley.

Soon Unity appeared, fresh and dainty in her white dress and pink hat, followed by her sister Susan bearing a heavy pasteboard box. While Mark awkwardly helped his lady into the buggy, Susan slipped the box under the seat. Mark got in and the brown mare, needing no command, started away.

"I put up some lunch," Susan called after them. "Don't forget to eat it!"

"And so," breathed Unity, "you're really going away—at last! How did you happen to decide to go just now?"

"I don't know. It just came to me the other day that I couldn't stay here any longer. Somehow, ever since we began to talk of the city, this place has seemed so small and shut in—until this morning."

"Until this morning?" in some alarm.

"Then it seemed kind o' cozy and—and protected. I hate to leave it. I hate to leave you, Unity."

"And I'll hate to have you go. But, of course, you must. And then, before very long, you'll come back—and take me away with you."

For a while in silence they gave this prospect the consideration it deserved. Then:

"Oh, Unity, how can you love me so?"

She was able to answer him on this point in a way to satisfy him and yet leave him humbly grateful for his vast good fortune.

The shadows were quite long when they espied a great flat rock in a clearing a little way from the road. And there, in a delicious intimacy that they solemnly asserted was but a foretaste, they remembered to eat the lunch put up by the thoughtful Susan. Afterward they spent a rapturous hour watching the sun glide down to meet the hills.

She broke a long silence to say, dreamily, "You're going to be very rich, aren't you?"

He laughed. "Maybe. It isn't always so easy to get rich, you know."

"But everybody says you will."

"Everybody—in Bethel—may not know." Then he added firmly, "But I will—for you. And then—"

He got down from the rock and lifted his arms to her. She stood uncertain, looking down at him. The glow of the sunset was still upon her; in her eyes was another glow, from within, for him.

She measured the distance to the ground—it was almost her own height—then, with a gasp for her daring, she sprang into his arms. He caught her and held her, kissing her again and again, thirstily. She began to respond; her arms tightened around his neck; she clung very close.

She cried tremulously, "Oh, Mark, you won't forget me—out there. I—I couldn't bear—that."

"I will not forget."

A last bright shaft reflected from the crimson west flooded their little clearing, fell upon her. And that was the picture of her he carried "out there"—Unity in the sunset glow, eyes and cheeks aflame with love, desiring him only and not that he would win.

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"Little late, ain't ye?" Simon greeted Mark. But there was no reproof in the words, and no question; he assumed no right to pry into his son's affairs.

"I've been taking a drive," Mark answered.

Simon rose and went into the pantry. He returned, carrying a pitcher

"If You Ever Get Rich—Come Back Here and Build a Steel Plant."

of milk and a plate piled high with buttered bread.

"I kept this ready fur ye. Thought ye might be hungry."

Mark was not hungry, but he ate with a show of great relish. Some instinct told him not to decline this little service.

"Guess ye're purty glad to git away from here?"

In the morning Mark would have answered with an unqualified "Yes." Now he said, "I am—and I'm not." He drew a long breath that was almost a sigh. "It's like going in swimming in April."

"Ye're right to go," Simon said. "I wouldn't want ye to stay. There ain't any prospect fur a young man round here."

He rose, and going to the cupboard, fumbled among the dishes. When he returned, he laid before Mark a worn pocketbook of leather. Mark opened it and glanced at its contents.

He looked up questioningly. "Why, there must be 'most a thousand dollars!"

"Jest that. I've been savin' it fur ye."

Impulsively Mark pushed it back toward Simon. "But I can't take it. It won't leave you anything, and I don't need it. I've got more'n five hundred of my own."

"I'd ruther ye'd take it," Simon insisted heavily. "It'll come in handy. If ye don't need it, ye can find a safe place fur it. An' ye can pay it back, if ye ever git rich. I," he repeated, "I've be'n savin' it fur ye. I knowed ye'd go away some day an' I wanted ye to take somethin'—frum me."

Mark's hand went slowly to the pocketbook. "All right, father." The words fell awkwardly. "I'll pay it back some day. And—thank you."

"Ye're quite welcome," answered Simon with quaint formality.

He went again to the cupboard and took down a battered tin candlestick. He lighted its candle and started toward the inward door. Half-way, he stopped abruptly and turned, his mouth working strangely.

"If ye ever git rich," he dragged the words out slowly, even painfully, "come back here an' build a steel plant. There's a heap of fine coal an' iron in these hills, an' the river an' railroad'll give ye good transportation. This valley's meant fur it. I was jest a little too early—an' a little too ignorant, I reckon. But ye're smarter an' better schooled than me, an' the time's comin'. I'd like to see a Truitt build it."

Never before had Simon Truitt spoken of his dream and failure to his son.

"Why, yes," Mark answered, on a sudden pitying impulse, "I'll think about it."

"Yes. Keep thinkin' about it. It's—it's a big idea."

Mark started. The phrase again! Simon went to the window and peered out into the silvery night—toward the south. Then he moved heavily toward the door. He turned again; the flickering light from the candle threw the lined, patient face into sharp relief.

"Good night, Mark."

"Good night, father."

The door closed. For many minutes Mark, left alone, absently fingered the pocketbook and thought of the man who had given it to him. Then he blew out the lamp and rose from the table.

He, too, paused at the window and looked out into the night, toward the south. He tried to see the sleeping valley as his father had dreamed it, alight with the fires of many furnaces, palpitant with the rumble of many engines. He thought he saw it.

The picture faded. He saw only a vague shadowy mass in a moonlit meadow, the dismantled forge, silent witness that for those who march upon the battlefield that is called industry is no third choice. They must conquer—or be conquered!

CHAPTER III.

The Masters.

He found himself, a lonely foreign figure knowing not whither he would go, somehow in the city's heart.

Chance led him to the principal thoroughfare. The city had begun to quit its toil, and the released toilers were pouring into the street, an endless unordered horde, heedless of him as they were of one another. Never before had he seen so many people.

He had a confused sense of being sucked into a narrow, gloomy canyon through which poured a flood of humanity, a treacherous, dangerous torrent, with many cross-currents. Countless faces, wan in the unnatural twilight, streamed by him; a stranger type to him, fox-featured, restless of eye.

Full darkness fell. He paused under a fiery sign, The Seneca. Through a great plate-glass window he saw a gaudy red and gold interior broken by many columns that to the inexpert eye somewhat resembled marble. Uniformed pages scurried to and fro. Well-dressed men lounged in easy chairs or sauntered leisurely about. Many lights burned brilliantly. He looked within longingly.

While he debated whether or not to enter this expensive-looking hostelry, a porter swooped upon him and snatched from his hands the ancient carpetbag that held his slender wardrobe.

"This way, suh!"

He followed the porter to the desk, painfully conscious of the figure he cut, uncouth, out of place. A clerk of lofty mien placed an open register before him.

"Write your name here."

Mark wrote it.

"And your town."

Mark hesitated—and then, with a dogged lowering of his head, firmly wrote the name of that city.

In the dining room that night many smiles were cast at the raw country youth. He did not regard himself as a subject for mirth. As he attacked the strange viands the waiter set before him, a little of his self-confidence returned. The vivid sense of a cruel, overpowering entity faded. Homesickness for Bethel, the refuge, subsided.

He began to take in details of the novel scene around him.

His ears strained to catch the remarks that floated to him from the neighboring tables. It was a strange tongue he heard, lightly dismissing topics that would have busied the gossips of Bethel for a moon. There was a young man who wore diamonds and talked in a loud and impressive fashion.

". . . Elizabeth, I see, broke the record again." (Elizabeth, it developed, was not a race horse, but one of the Quinby Steel company's blast furnaces.) "Yes, sir! More'n forty thousand tons. Henley says—I think so myself—we're going to have the biggest steel year yet. —No-o, I don't just exactly know him, but I know people that do.—And Tom Henley's going to be the biggest steel man in the business—gets his fifty thousand a year already. . . . MacGregor and Quinby? Oh, they're the richest. They let the others make the steel while they make the money. See? Ha! ha! . . . Tom Henley's the brains of the Quinby crowd. And he's the d——dest speculator. . . . Worth his half-million, they say, and ain't over thirty-five. . . ."

And this was the city from another angle. Tom Henley, evidently, had the monster well in hand.

The name had a familiar ring. Mark drew from his pocket a letter Richard Courtney had given him that morning. Upon it was inscribed, "To Thomas Henley, Esquire."

"He may be willing to help you find work," Courtney had said, "if he remembers me."

Mark regarded the letter thoughtfully. He wondered what was in it. After a moment's hesitation he opened—it was unsealed—and read it.

"My Dear Henley," the letter ran, "I am sending you one who is the work of my hands. He is a young man of parts, 'good friends,' as we say up here in Bethel, 'with work.' Also he has a nose for money.' They are qualities for which you, perhaps, can help him find a market. . . . I say he is my handiwork; but he is an unfinished product. What, I wonder, will the new life that succeeds me as his mentor make of him? Perhaps I should let him strike out for himself and learn at once the ugly cruelty of the struggle that now seems to him so glorious. But we oldsters have the habit of helping youth to the sugar-plums of which we have learned the after-taste. . . . And this introduction is the last thing I can do for a young man who means much to me."

After many minutes' study Mark came to his decision. He would present himself and the letter to Thomas Henley. He would do it that very night. He rose from his dinner.

"Where," he inquired of the supercilious clerk, "does Thomas Henley live? I must see him tonight."

The directions brought Mark at length into the heart of a small community from which the city still kept at a humble distance. Not so the fog, which was no respecter even of gilded colonies. From a tall iron fence sloped a wide sweeping lawn dotted at exact intervals with trees and shrubbery. And in its center loomed a great shadowy mass, punctured by many windows shooting broad luminous bars into the fog. It was the castle of the tamer.

He proceeded with a boldness proper to adventurers in Eldorado, past the waiting carriages that lined the graveled driveway, to the wide veranda. There he halted. From within came the strains of music and a gay clamor of voices. He could not know that on this night the tamer gave a feast, a formal dedication of the new castle to the entertainment of his kind. But he felt the hour to be ill-suited to his purpose.

Yet it was effected.

Curiosity to look within carried him to a window. To his wondering gaze unfolded a vista of Irish point and damask satin, carved mahogany and marble figures, gilt-framed pictures and silken rugs.

And amid this lavish display of beauties paraded a bevy of creatures seeming to his excited fancy to have stepped out of "Arabian Nights."

"Unity," he said, "will like that."

While he stood there a troop of men, garbed in a monotony of black and white, marched into the room. At the same time voices came from another wing of the veranda.

And then he, son of the blacksmith of Bethel, became a spectator at the birth of a project that for a brief but brilliant period was to move the world to hosannas!

"Henley," said the first voice, deep, yet softly flowing as honey, "I have come to the time of life when a man of sense puts away the lusts of the flesh—"

"Is your digestion out of order?" interrupted the second, sharper, less musical and with a sardonic quality that delighted the listener. "I noticed you didn't eat much tonight."

"Ah! It is more than stomach. It is soul!" the mellow voice flowed on. "My labors and investments have been blessed with good fortune. So I am now able to turn my energies to the higher duties, to doing large things for humanity. And lately my thoughts have dwelt much on—philanthropy and paleontology."

The speaker, like Brutus, paused for a reply.

"Mmm! Two 'p's,'" it came. "Quite alliterative. Go on."

"Henley, you are the first to whom I have spoken of my purpose. It is fixed. In what nobler work, what more fertile philanthropy, can a man of wealth engage than in the development of the science of paleontology? Think, Henley—to add to humanity's knowledge of the extinct life that came before our own! It is a labor to fire the imagination. And that is my purpose. I shall build and endow in this city the most complete paleontological institute in the world, and before I lay aside the project, a branch institution in each of the largest cities of the nation." The voice trembled with emotion.

There was a sound as of two hands sharply meeting. "Good! I see! Let the Scotchman look to his laurels! MacGregor may build his libraries, but Quinby shall have his paleontological institutes!"

Mark wondered at the patience of the answer. "Ah! You are pleased to jest. But the project is new to you. And," sighingly, "the young think only of wealth and power."

"My dear Mr. Quinby," the other purred, "no man in his senses could jest at paleontology, — What the devil!"

The speakers had turned the corner of the veranda and come upon the eavesdropper. Thus for the first time Mark Truitt looked upon the two men in whose legions he was to conquer.

Who has not in fancy's gallery a portrait of Jeremiah Quinby, taken from the prints of the day when his star swept so brilliant through the sky? The lofty brow seems to shelter a very ferment of noble projects. The grave eyes and mouth speak to us of a great soul anguished by the sight of suffering humanity's needs, which he is bravely, self-effacingly seeking to relieve.

Photography has been less kind to Thomas Henley. No philanthropy has claimed him as its apostle. And then he was a less promising subject for the art. His body was squat and heavy; his face was bony and ugly and arrogant, often still further marred by a cold, cynical sneer. A lesser man, thus presented, would have been repulsive. Yet from Henley radiated a tremendous vitality that made him magnetic or compelling as he chose—the dynamic quality that could galvanize a man or a regiment to the mad effort he demanded. After the first glance Mark looked no more upon Quinby; he understood why the philanthropist had so meekly swallowed the insolence.

"This," he thought, "is a man."

Henley charged upon him, gripping his arm.

"What the devil," he repeated, "are you doing here?"

"Looking into the window."

"What are you doing that for?"

"Because," Mark answered simply, "I never saw anything like it before."

"Probably," the philanthropist-to-be suggested nervously, backing away, "he is some speak thief. Perhaps you'd better hold him while I get help."

"Oh, don't be frightened," Henley replied protectively. "I won't let him bite you."

The sardonic note was again uppermost. Mark, looking down at Henley—he had the advantage of his captor by half a head—grinned involuntarily, and was himself led into impudence.

"No, I won't bite you, Mr. Quinby."

Quinby took another step backward, his nervousness becoming more manifest. "He knows my name! He may be some crank who—"

"My dear sir!" This time there was a touch of impatience in the words. "Gentlemen of your importance must expect their names to become household words. If you'll feel easier, step inside while I attend to this Peeping Tom."

The philanthropist, still insensible—it seemed—to the thinly veiled insolence, accepted the suggestion.

(Continued)